

The power shift of sales

While the marketing role has shifted and changed dramatically, it is the sales role that is most underestimated. It has had to evolve dramatically as a result of the connected world we live in, and adapt to the new customer that this has bred.



Quinton Pienaar, CEO, Agilitude, a Salesforce platinum reseller and customer experience evangelist, says the sales profession can no longer be underestimated: “If businesses want to succeed in a world that is driven and dominated by the customer they need to respect the role of sales and invest in quality people: “The skill set required does not resemble what companies had previously perceived as important. The sales role has been underestimated and possibly undervalued. It is a challenging job and requires several key skills, especially in today’s world with a connected customer.”

The sales department has evolved, according to Pienaar, from a traditional production sales approach to a greater focus on a marketing partnership approach: “This has influenced the importance of the sales role as they grapple with the expectations of today’s connected customer.”

He says that management teams need to be aware of the major shift and ensure they equip their sales teams with the right tools if they are to succeed in the connected environment: “Traditional tools will never be enough to succeed in a world where Google literally processes 2.4 million searches every minute; 700,000 people login to Facebook and Amazon sells over \$200,000 of physical and digital goods.”

The customer-driven market means that sales people are facing more competition than ever before: “There is a constant race to win the customer’s attention, even before you start to sell. These same customers are enlightened and already armed with so much knowledge about what they want. This makes the sales role so much more than order taking; rather it has become advisory with the same intent to sell”, says Pienaar.

Vital skill

He says that sales people, while still driven to close the sale, are tasked with uncovering the customer need: “This is especially difficult in today’s environment where the customer is in the driving seat.”

A study by the [Corporate Executive Board](#) found that 60% of the buying process takes place before there is any real engagement with a sales representative. It states that in the new era of sales, customer knowledge reigns supreme. With research and reviews only a click away, customers have become comfortable making decisions based on widely available information, and may have little time or desire to listen to a sales or marketing pitch.

Pienaar says this accurately outlines why the sales role has become increasingly important to business success: “Sales people are vital to business and they need to be respected for the skills they possess and the role they play in the increasingly connected and competitive landscape.”

Pienaar says the following sales skills are non-negotiable:

- Ability to open a conversation (essentially cold calling).
- Experienced enough to gain interest and attention from customers while conveying an important business message.
- Capacity to both understand and solve problems.
- Aptitude to network and build relationships.
- Negotiation skills.
- Administrative skills.

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